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**THE DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIC THINKING  
PROFICIENCY MODEL USING GROUNDED THEORY**

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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA  
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**THE DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIC THINKING PROFICIENCY MODEL  
USING GROUNDED THEORY**



**By**

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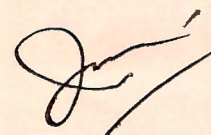


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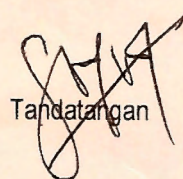
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## ABSTRACT

Changes present challenges and opportunities for current and future managers. They must continuously learn to equip themselves with the necessary competencies to cope and adapt in this volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environment. Past studies revealed that proficiencies were acquired from various learning experiences. Strategic thinking proficiency is identified as a critical skill to predict the environment accurately and remain competitive in an increasingly unstable business environment. Nonetheless, many managers are not prepared and lack this proficiency. The primary aim of this study was to investigate salient learning experiences which contributed to the strategic thinking proficiency development (STPD) amongst a group of twenty-five Malaysian managers. Semi-structured interviews were utilised in this qualitative study. Data collection and analysis followed the principles of grounded theory. The researcher gathered and analysed data, using the techniques of constant comparison and theoretical sampling. Data collected were transcribed, coded and analysed simultaneously to identify major themes, and continuously comparing them to find significant relationships. The results led to the sorting of data into six significant themes: formal and informal learning, individual factors, work and life experiences, organizational factors, current role/position and relationship/networking. The findings revealed that managers developed their strategic thinking proficiency through a combination of learning experiences. A proposed model on STPD which linked the concept and characteristics of strategic thinking with the learning experiences cited by participants as significant and meaningful in the development of their strategic thinking proficiency, was a major contribution in this study. The use of grounded theory provided a methodological contribution to the study. The findings also provide some practical guidelines to HRD practitioners by focusing on how best managers learn in order to develop effective programs specifically in the development of strategic thinkers in the workplace.

**Keywords:** strategic thinking, qualitative, learning experiences, human resource development

## ABSTRAK

Perubahan memberi cabaran dan peluang kepada pengurus masa kini dan masa hadapan. Mereka perlu belajar secara berterusan untuk melengkapkan diri dengan kecekapan yang diperlukan bagi mendepani dan menyesuaikan diri dengan persekitaran yang sentiasa berubah, tidak menentu, rumit dan kabur. Kajian lepas mendedahkan bahawa kecekapan diperolehi dari pelbagai pengalaman pembelajaran. Kecekapan pemikiran strategik dikenal pasti sebagai satu kemahiran kritikal yang perlu ada untuk meramal persekitaran dengan tepat dan kekal bersaing dalam dunia perniagaan yang semakin tidak stabil. Namun begitu, ramai pengurus yang tidak bersedia and kurang mahir dalam pemikiran strategik. Tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk menyelidik pengalaman pembelajaran yang signifikan dan menyumbang terhadap pembangunan kecekapan pemikiran strategik dalam kalangan 25 pengurus Malaysia. Temubual separa berstruktur digunakan dalam kajian kualitatif ini. Pengutipan dan penganalisaan data dijalankan mengikut prinsip *grounded theory*. Penyelidik mengumpul dan menganalisa data menggunakan teknik perbandingan bermalar dan persampelan secara teori. Data yang dikutip disalin semula, dikod dan dianalisa secara serentak untuk mengenal pasti tema utama, dan melakukan perbandingan secara berterusan untuk mencari hubungan yang signifikan. Hasilnya membawa pengkelasan data kepada enam tema yang signifikan: pembelajaran formal dan tidak formal, faktor individu, pengalaman hidup dan kerja, faktor organisasi, peranan/jawatan sekarang dan hubungan/jaringan kerja. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pengurus membangunkan kecekapan pemikiran strategik melalui gabungan pelbagai pengalaman pembelajaran. Cadangan model pembangunan kecekapan pemikiran strategik yang menghubungkan konsep dan ciri-ciri pemikiran strategik dengan pengalaman pembelajaran yang dinyatakan oleh pengurus-pengurus yang terlibat sebagai signifikan dan bermakna dalam pembangunan kecekapan pemikiran strategik mereka merupakan sumbangan utama dalam kajian ini. Penggunaan *grounded theory* pula merupakan sumbangan kaedah dalam kajian ini. Dapatan kajian turut memberi garispanduan kepada pengamal Pembangunan Sumber Manusia dengan tumpuan tentang cara terbaik pengurus belajar bagi membangunkan program-program yang berkesan terutamanya dalam pembangunan pemikir strategik di tempat kerja.

**Katakunci:** pemikiran strategik, kualitatif, pengalaman pembelajaran, pembangunan sumber manusia



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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

In this chapter, the researcher addressed the statement of the problem and research objectives. The focus of the study was on the significant learning experiences perceived by managers to have substantial impacts on their development in acquiring the ability to be proficient in a certain skill, which is strategic thinking.

Fundamentally, the aim of the study was to identify learning experiences that contributed to the development of strategic thinking proficiency amongst a group of managers. By understanding how managers learned and acquired their proficiency and expertise in strategic thinking, the researcher proposed a framework for strategic thinking proficiency development. This chapter provided an anthology of this study. This chapter also discussed the significance of the study, and the limitations to the study were addressed. This chapter concluded by outlining the operational definitions applied in this study.

This study was designed to fill the gap in understanding how managers developed their strategic thinking proficiency using a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a process which involved interpreting participants' perceptions that made sense out of the subject matter (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). This study was written based on the participants' own voice on their learning

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